Mr. President, We Hardly Knew Ye

Who knew that Lyndon B. Johnson had a button by his bed that allowed him to control the Muzak being piped throughout the house and cow pastures on his ranch? Or that he owned an amphibious vehicle? Political analyst and presidential historian Michael Beschloss addressed these and other interesting topics in Lincoln Theater in March as part of the Rogow Distinguished Visiting Lecturers Program.

Dubbed by Newsweek as “the nation’s leading presidential historian,” Beschloss brought history alive for a capacity audience with his scrutiny of the personal lives of, and common misconceptions surrounding, some of the nation’s past presidents. The author of eight books, Beschloss is a regular commentator on PBS’s “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.” He also maintains a full schedule of appearances on documentaries like The Kennedys and the American Experience series, also on PBS.

During his lecture, Beschloss spoke of the importance of national treasures and of using hindsight to look at political figures and judge the potential of current presidential candidates. These topics have significance today, he said. Recent presidents, out of fear of being damaged by disclosures at a later date, have followed their legal advisers’ counsel to stop accumulating the personal records that make up part of the material in presidential libraries.

Such a change in traditional practice is unfortunate for historians, said Beschloss. The lack of records and tapes from a presidential term creates a bleak outlook for scholars and possible biographers of former presidents. Because of the absence of this type of material in the future, Beschloss foresees a lack of historical exhibits like American Originals: Treasures from the National Archives. This traveling exhibition of some of the most important documents in U.S. history was in residence from February to mid-May at the university’s Museum of American Political Life. The exhibit in Hartford was made possible by United Technologies.

As for current presidential candidates, Beschloss suggested ways to evaluate their potential. By looking at the past, he feels, we are able to inform ourselves about the future of politics. Above all, he advocates the importance of risking popularity for the good of the nation. This “willingness to do what’s right,” regardless of the consequences, is exemplified, according to Beschloss, by John F. Kennedy’s strong support of civil rights in the face of sometimes violent opposition.

Could he also be referring to President George W. Bush’s handling of the war in Iraq asked someone in the audience. “I have no opinion of presidents who are alive,” Beschloss said with a smile.

Don’t Shoot the Messenger

Paul Gigot, Pulitzer Prize-winning political columnist and editorial page editor of the Wall Street Journal, gave his take on the 2004 presidential election to a packed Lincoln Theater in March.

Prior to his lecture, the university presented Gigot with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters. Gigot’s talk was presented by the Ruth B. and Charles W. Deeds Symposium.

Opening with a joke to illustrate the modesty, or lack thereof, of the journalism profession, Gigot alternated between insightful commentary and lighthearted humor that poked fun at Democrats and Republicans alike.

The 2004 presidential election, Gigot said, is stimulating much-needed debate on the role of American power in a post-9/11 world.

He assessed the strengths and weaknesses of President George Bush and Democratic challenger John Kerry. Bush is considered a strong leader whether you are with him or not, Gigot said, but noted that job growth will be Bush’s biggest vulnerability.

Kerry will be dogged by his perceived “flip-flopping” on issues, Gigot said. Kerry is “presidential” enough to have a chance to beat President Bush, according to Gigot, but he added that there are more Democrats who are passionate about beating President Bush than there are Republicans who are passionate about re-electing him.

Gigot ended his talk by predicting that President Bush will be re-elected by a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent. “If I’m wrong,” he said, holding his hands up to the audience in mock-defense, “please don’t hold it against my...
Celebrating Special Olympians

More than 1,000 athletes, along with hundreds of coaches, family members, and friends, came to the university campus to compete in the Special Olympics Connecticut Eastern Regional Games. For those taking part in the opening ceremonies in the Chase Family Arena or watching any of the competitions, Saturday, May 22, truly was a special day.

The day was made especially memorable by the participation of Sargent Shriver, chairman emeritus of Special Olympics, who officially declared the games open and later attended the competitions. On the previous evening, the university presented Shriver with an honorary degree in recognition of his lifelong work as a humanitarian and statesman.

Wherever he went, Shriver stopped to give the athletes hugs and to encourage them. He posed for pictures with athletes and their families, who all thanked him for his efforts on behalf of the Special Olympics movement.

Aquatics, tennis, and soccer competitions were held at the university. Track and field, wheelchair races, and adaptive sports competitions were held at the adjacent Weaver High School in Hartford.

In addition to Shriver, the opening ceremonies featured remarks by former Connecticut Governor Lowell Weicker, Jr., whose son took part in the aquatics competition, as well as University President Walter Harrison and Weaver High School Principal Paul Stringer ’75.

Stringer noted that the Games had a special meaning for him because he is a university alumnus and a former special education teacher. Tom Monahan of NBC 30 was the master of ceremonies for the event.

Dozens of university employees worked as volunteers at the Games, as did hundreds of other Greater Hartford residents.

These Games marked the first time that Special Olympics Connecticut had a partner in putting on a regional competition. It was also the first event for the newly constituted Eastern Region, which is a merger of the North Central Region and the former East Region.

The new Eastern Region is composed of more than 80 towns. Teams from Norwich to Enfield and from Middletown to Manchester took part in the Opening Ceremonies. Five members from each of the teams paraded into the arena. A symbolic Olympic torch was lighted, and four athletes took part in a ceremonial torch run, each accompanied by a member of a local law enforcement agency.

Geri Shaw, director of the Special Olympics Connecticut Eastern Region, called the Games “a tremendous success.” Both Shaw and Irwin Nussbaum, associate vice president for student life and university coordinator of the Games, said they were excited about the potential for the 2005 Games returning to the university.

“Your unparalleled record of public service is extraordinary,” University Regent Jean-Pierre van Rooy (far right) told Sargent Shriver (center) in presenting him with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters on May 21, the eve of the 2004 Special Olympics Connecticut Eastern Regional Games on campus. Also shown are (far left) University President Walter Harrison, Jeff DiPina (second from left), Special Olympics athlete and Global Messenger; and Beau Doherty (second from right), president of Special Olympics Connecticut.
Creativity and Research in the Limelight


These are but a few of the more than 20 student presentations made at the University of Hartford 2004 Undergraduate Research and Creativity Colloquium held in April. The event was sponsored by the university’s Honors Program and campus chapters of Alpha Chi and Alpha Lambda Delta national honor societies, with the continued support of University President Walter Harrison and his wife, Dianne. Some 60 students, representing all of the university’s schools and colleges, gave presentations at the forum, which is held each spring to enable students to present outstanding scholarly and creative work to their peers, faculty, administrators, and other guests. The two projects shown above give some idea of the wide-ranging scope of the colloquium and the amount of planning and preparation that preceded the presentations.

Go West, Young Man

While many college students dream of traveling cross-country with just a knapsack and the wind at their backs, Dan Dabek ’06 is doing just that—and all for a good cause. This summer, he is one of 90 bicyclists who will hop on their Cannondale R400 bikes in New Haven, Conn., and travel westward, raising money and helping to build houses along the way on the Habitat for Humanity Bicycle Challenge.

Volunteers are the backbone of Habitat for Humanity International (HFH), a nonprofit, nondenominational Christian organization founded in 1976 that helps low-income families build homes. Since then, volunteers for HFH have raised money and helped build more than 50,000 houses in the United States and another 100,000+ in communities around the world.

Dabek, a music composition major at The Hartt School, comes from a family of Habitat volunteers. His father, sister, and mother have all been involved in various Habitat projects.

The ride for Habitat for Humanity will not be easy. The three groups of 30 volunteers have chosen one of three possible trails. Starting from New Haven, they will finish either at Seattle, Wash.; San
Francisco, Calif.; or Portland, Ore. Dabek chose the latter for good reason. This is the first year the “Oregon Trail” route has been active, and Dabek realizes the importance of bringing Habitat to new places. “One of the main purposes of this ride is that we’re going through these towns and telling [people] about Habitat—that’s probably one of the major reasons I’m doing it.”

The volunteers ride between 30 and 120 miles a day and do little more than eat, sleep, build, and ride. While Dabek does admit that the ride over the Rocky Mountains will be tough, he says he thinks that the hardest part, so far, has been the fund-raising.

Each cyclist has to raise $4,000 for the trip. As of this writing, Dabek has a little less than $1,000 left to reach his goal. He has received numerous donations from both his hometown of Stratford, Conn., and businesses in towns surrounding the University of Hartford. Cannondale Bicycle Corp., a Connecticut-based company, has donated all the bikes for the riders. Last year’s group of 60 cyclists raised $175,000 for HFH of Greater New Haven, according to the Habitat Web site.

Although he’ll be spending a lot of time on his bike this summer, Dabek will not be neglecting his music. “I have found that I get to this level, after cycling for a while, and then a continuous musical piece begins to form in my head,” he says. He plans on keeping a musical journal during the trip to jot down his road compositions.

## Rubber Ducks and Moonwalks on Campus

The sun shone brightly on the University of Hartford campus one Saturday in April, as hundreds of rubber ducks raced down the Hog River, prospective broadcasters tried out their skills in a real TV studio, and children bounced, made music, and listened to stories. These events, along with many others, declared the arrival of the second annual Community Day. An estimated 1,000 people came to campus for a day of fun, entertainment, and discovery.

Many of those who attended were first-time visitors to the University of Hartford. The mission of Community Day is to increase public awareness of the many wonderful programs, activities, and resources that the university offers to the Greater Hartford community.

Gengras Lawn was transformed into a giant playground for the new Family Fun Day component of the event. Children of all ages bounced around on inflatable moonwalks and slides and took rides in a brightly colored train. In and around Gengras Student Union, they played carnival games, made arts and crafts projects, and tried their hands at various musical instruments at the “instrument petting zoo,” run by students from The Hartt School.

University Players theater group and Hartt School students performed, and there was a softball doubleheader and a youth soccer clinic. Engineering students displayed their floatable concrete canoe. Howie the Hawk made the rounds on campus, and a giant yellow duck greeted children and promoted the university’s First Annual Duck Marathon. Participants, who paid $5 per duck to enter the race, crowded along the banks to watch the outcome as hundreds of rubber ducks floated down the Hog River in a colorful race benefitting the Hawks’ Athletics Board.

Organizers for the Community Day were Jonathan Easterbrook, ’87, ’90, director of advertising and marketing at the university, and Nicole Denkus ’04, a May graduate of the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions.

“The University of Hartford has always stayed remarkably true to its mission of being a valued resource to the Greater Hartford community,” said Easterbrook. “We are a private university, but we have a distinctly public purpose.”